

Message Text

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TO USDEL ASWAN IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 063547

EXDIS TOSEC 835

FOLLOWING REPEAT SAIGON 3154 ACTION SECSTATE INFO BUDAPEST

WARSAW NHA TRANG DATED 20 MAR 75

QUOTE

C O N F I D A N T I A L SAIGON 3154

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: CASC HU ICRC ID IR PL PINS VS

SUBJECT: EFFORTS TO OBTAIN INFORMATION ON AMERICANS

MISSING IN BAN ME THUOT

1. TEN AMERICANS (LISTED BELOW) WERE KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN IN OR NEAR BAN ME THUOT AT THE TIME OF THE NVA ATTACK ON THE CITY MARCH 10. WE WERE IN INTERMITTENT RADIO CONTACT WITH A GROUP OF EIGHT UNTIL 11:30 MARCH 12, BUT HAVE HAD NO INFORMATION ON THEIR FATE SINCE THAT TIME.

2. WE BELIEVE WE SHOULD NOW PRESS AHEAD THROUGH ALL SUITABLE CHANNELS IN AN ATTEMPT TO GAIN INFORMATION ON THE WHEREABOUTS AND STATE OF HEALTH OF THESE PERSONS, AND TO OBTAIN THEIR RELEASE IF THEY ARE BEING HELD.

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3. THE FOLLOWING ACCOUNT OF THE SITUATION CAN BE USED IN MAKING

OUR APPROACHES: TEN AMERICANS ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN IN OR NEAR THE TOWN OF BAN ME THUOT, CAPITAL OF DARLAC PROVINCE, REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM, WHEN IT WAS ATTACKED ON MARCH 10, 1975. EIGHT AMERICANS WERE IN THE COMPOUND OF THE U.S. PROVINCE REPRESENTATIVE AS FOLLOWS: PAUL A. STRUHARIK, U.S. PROVINCE REPRESENTATIVE, DARLAC (RESPONSIBLE FOR MONITORING U.S. ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS, RECONSTRUCTION, AND REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT); MR. JOHN D. MILLER OF THE SUMMER INSTITUTE OF LINGUISTICS (A MISSIONARY ORGANIZATION) WITH HIS WIFE CAROLYN P. MILLER AND DAUGHTER LUCILLE A. MILLER; MRS. BETTY J. MITCHELL OF THE CHRISTIAN AND MISSIONARY ALLIANCE; MR. RICHARD L. PHILLIPS OF THE CHRISTIAN AND MISSIONARY ALLIANCE WITH HIS WIFE LILLIAN M. PHILLIPS; AND MR. JAY SCARBOROUGH, A CORNELL UNIVERSITY LINGUIST WORKING IN BAN ME THUOT ON A FORD FOUNDATION GRANT. INTERMITTENT RADIO CONTACT WAS MAINTAINED WITH THIS GROUP UNTIL MARCH 12, AND SINCE THAT TIME NO INFORMATION HAS BEEN RECEIVED. MRS. LINDA SMITH (WIFE OF JOSEPH E. SMITH, AN EMPLOYEE OF THE FEDERAL ELECTRIC COMPANY IN SAIGON) AND HER DAUGHTER MICHELLE LYNN SMITH WERE VISITING IN THE BAN ME THUOT AREA AT THE TIME OF THE ATTACK, AND THEIR PRESENT WHEREABOUTS IS UNKNOWN. (EARLIER REPORTS LISTED MRS. MITCHELL "AND DAUGHTER"; MISSIONARY SOURCES IN SAIGON INDICATE MRS. MITCHELL HAD NO CHILDREN IN BAN ME THUOT AND SPECULATED SHE MIGHT HAVE BEEN TEMPORARILY CARING FOR A NON-AMERICAN CHILD.)

4. SAIGON REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CHRISTIAN AND MISSIONARY ALLIANCE (CMA) AND SUMMER INSTITUTE OF LINGUISTICS (SIL) HAVE DESCRIBED TO US THE EFFORTS THEY ARE UNDERTAKING TO GARNER INFORMATION ON THEIR PERSONNEL. CMA HAS BEEN IN TOUCH WITH "PRG" DELEGATION SEVERAL TIMES BY TELEPHONE AND HAS PASSED ON TO CONTACT THERE NAMES OF ALL MISSING AMERICAN PERSONNEL OF CMA AND SIL. "PRG" CONTACT HAS SAID HE IS SEEKING INFO FOR THEM AND HAS AGREED TO ACCEPT LETTER FROM CMA SATURDAY MARCH 22 (APPARENTLY TO BE PASSED ON OCCASION OF REGULAR "PRG" SATURDAY PRESS CONFERENCE) WHICH WILL SET FORTH PRECISE NAMES, AGES, AND PASSPORT NUMBERS OF MISSING INDIVIDUALS, AND WILL INCLUDE PICTURES. LETTER WILL MAKE APPEAL ON GROUND MISSING PERSONS ENGAGED IN PURELY HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITIES. SIL WILL PROBABLY PASS SIMILAR LETTER ON SAME OCCASION. MORNING MARCH 19 CMA AND SIL REPS TOOK LETTERS TO LOCAL ICRC OFFICE AND TO ICCS. THEY HAVE REQUESTED APPOINTMENT WITH MARCH ICCS CHAIRMAN AMBASSADOR SUHUD. CMA IS ALSO TRYING TO

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STIMULATE PRESS INTEREST.

5. AS REPORTED SEPARATELY EMBASSY HAS TAKEN FOLLOWING STEPS:

ON MORNING OF MARCH 11 WE RAISED OUR CONCERN WITH SAFETY OF EIGHT AMERICANS IN BAN ME THUOT WITH AMBASSADOR SUHUD, CHAIRMAN OF THE ICCS, AND WITH AMBASSADOR ESFANDIARY (SAIGON 2701). ON

MARCH 15 AMBASSADOR ESFANDIARY TOLD US THAT AMBASSADOR FIJALKOWSKI, CHIEF OF POLISH ICCS DELEGATION, HAD INQUIRED ABOUT IRANIAN AND INDONESIAN OFFICERS IN BAN ME THUOT AND WAS TOLD BY "PRG" REPRESENTATIVE THAT "PRG" WOULD "RETURN ALL FOREIGN NATIONALS" IF THEY CAPTURED BAN ME THUOT (SAIGON 2851). MARCH 18, SENIOR POLISH OFFICER OF POLISH DELEGATION INFORMED US IN STRICT CONFIDENCE THAT FIJALKOWSKI HAD ALSO REQUESTED THE POLISH FOREIGN MINISTRY TO INTERVENE WITH THE "PRG" TO OBTAIN GUARANTEES FOR THE SAFETY OF THE AMERICANS.

6. WE ARE SENDING A NOTE TO AMBASSADOR SUHUD, WHOSE CHAIRMANSHIP OF ICCS EXPIRES AT END OF MOCTP, TO FORMALLY FOLLOW-UP OUR ORAL APPROACH OF MARCH 11 AND REQUEST THAT ICCS SEEK INFORMATION FROM BOTH SVN PARTIES AS TO WHEREABOUTS AND SAFETY OF THE EIGHT AMERICANS. WE ALSO PLAN TO HAVE US DELEGATE TO FPJMT RAISE MATTER WITH BOTH DRV AND "PRG" COUNTERPARTS. MEANWHILE WE ARE PURSUING INQUIRIES WITH GVN AND THROUGH INTERROGATION OF REFUGEES FROM DARLAC PROVINCE.

7. WE RECOMMEND STRONGLY THAT DEPARTMENT INSTRUCT EMBASSIES WARSAW AND BUDAPEST TO RAISE MATTER WITH FOREIGN MINISTRIES. THIS IN OUR VIEW IS LIKELY TO BE MOST EFFECTIVE CHANNEL FOR GETTING EFFECTIVE ACTION.

8. DESPITE PAST COMMUNIST RELUCTANCE DEAL WITH RED CROSS BELIEVE IT WOULD NEVERTHELESS BE USEFUL TO PUT MATTER ON RECORD WITH ICRC, WHICH IS PRIMARY INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION CONCERNED WITH PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN WARTIME, AND SUGGEST THAT DEPARTMENT DO SO IN GENEVA.

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